

## 4.1 Reasons behind the ''Tsunami''

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Drysdale reported in 1989, that the number of first year students enrolled in Japanese language programs Australia-wide had risen to two thousand six hundred and ninety five (2,695) in 1988, compared with eight hundred and ninety four (894) students who had completed the first year program at the end of 1986. The first-year enrolments further increased in 1989 to three thousand three hundred and forty (3,340) (Drysdale 1989:3).

The shift in student enrolments from 1983 to 1989 is presented below. The table shows the number of students successfully completing or enrolled in first and higher years of Japanese language study programs in Australia's tertiary education institutions. Data here has been extracted from the 1989 *Japanese Studies in Australia* (Australia-Japan Research Centre 1989:5).

**Table 3: The Shift in Student Enrolments between 1983 and 1989**

	1983	1986	1988	1989
First Year	550	894	2695	3340
Higher Years	523	731	1331	2179
Total	1073	1625	4026	5519

#### 4.1 Reasons behind the *Tsunami*

It still baffles Japan specialists in Australia today why the tsunami-like increase of students occurred in a single leap between 1987 and 1988, and with such momentum. Japanese academia in Australian universities, however, had been aware for sometime that the demands for Japanese studies courses were increasing.

Awareness that the future of Australia lay with Asia had been gradually spreading in the Australian community since the 1970s. With a strongly Asia-focused policy and multiculturalism, recognition came from the government, industries and general educated communities.

The establishment of the Asian Studies Council in 1986 demonstrated a

recognition at the government level that the promotion of Asian language skills and understanding of Asian culture would contribute towards Australia's national interests (Lo Bianco 1993:92). The Asian Studies Council stated in one of the objectives of its National Strategy that 'Asian content is an element in all appropriate subjects in all years of education from the beginning of primary to the end of tertiary education by 1995' (Asian Studies Council 1988).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Asian Studies Council commissioned in 1988 the 'Inquiry into the Teaching of Asian Studies and Languages in Higher Education', which resulted in 1989 a report titled *Asia in Australian Higher Education*, commonly known as the *Ingleson Report*. The Report cited Japanese, Chinese and Indonesian as the three major Asian languages for Australia, and recommended that access to these languages should be provided to all undergraduate students in Australia by 1993.

*We recommend that an immediate goal should be to broaden the base of Japanese, Chinese and Indonesian language study in higher education institutions by making them more extensively available on tertiary campuses. Within five years, by 1993, they should be available to students on every campus in every state. [Recommendation 31 : paragraph 7.12] (Ingleson, et. al. 1989:19)*

Recognition of Japan's important role in the region formed the central part of Australia's Asia awareness. Japan had emerged not only as the largest trading partner for Australia, but also as a prominent economic power in the world. The relationship with Japan had to be taken into consideration in all aspects of Australia's international relations. Since the early 1970s, consecutive Australian governments had been promoting the importance of closer relationship with Japan. The attention of the media also was increasingly drawn to Japan and Japan- related affairs.

*The priority that attaches to Japan derives both from the invigoration of commitment in the Australian community to the*

*relationship with Asia and from the emergence of Japan as the second most powerful force in the world economy, so that its influence touches upon all aspects of international affairs.*  
(Drysdale 1989:2)

As trade relations between Australia and Japan increased, business communities were increasingly vocal of their need for graduates with Japan skills and literacy. Career opportunities for graduates equipped with Japanese language competency, together with relevant knowledge of Japan appeared to be rapidly expanding.

Another aspect of Japan awareness came from tourism. Japan's economic growth of the 1980s resulted in a large number of Japanese tourists arriving at Australia's shores each year. This presented the Australian community with visible evidence of the increasing closeness of Japan and Australia. At the same time, the increasing number of Japanese tourists contributed to the expansion of career opportunities in the hospitality industries for the graduates with Japanese language and Japan-related skills.

All this led to the growing perception by Australian students and their parents that training in Japan skills and literacy would likely lead graduates to better career opportunities. Given a national environment such as this, it was perhaps not so surprising that Australia saw a large increase in students' enrolment in Japanese studies and Japan- related courses. What was unexpected, however, was the fact that the increase occurred in such an extravagant scale within such short a period.

On one hand, the tsunami of 1988 presented an enormous opportunity for Australian universities to expand Japanese studies and related areas with much increased numbers of students. On the other, none of the universities were equipped to cope with the sudden increase in demand. Japanese academia in Australia were not only astounded, but also overwhelmed with the enormity of the task ahead. Increased number of students required a quick expansion of programs. University structures in general, however, were poorly suited for responding to a sudden change of any kind. In the face of the influx of students, academic members of

Japanese programs were left to cope with shortages of instructors, funding, facilities, such as language laboratories, and a number of other associated problems all at once.

*The consequence is a genuine sense of crisis for Japanese studies programs in our universities and colleges and in other areas of the education system. (ibid.:3)*

Ideally this was the time for Australian academia to take advantage of the increased demand for Japan skills and literacy, and to develop programs that effectively contributed to the national interest as well as to individual student's intellectual development. Instead, Japanese academia had to first cope with the immediate difficulties brought about by the *Tsunami*-like influx of student numbers.

#### 4.2 Staff Shortages

The previously mentioned 1988/1989 survey of Japanese Studies in Australia could not have been more timely. It took place when the *Tsunami* influx of students was actually happening all across Australia. For this survey, thirteen universities and one college in Australia were chosen to give a detailed description of their programs in the form of an essay. In them, vivid accounts were presented of how each program was coping or, in many cases, struggling with the new situation.

Almost without exception, every institution listed staff shortage as the major problem which needed to be addressed immediately. Shortage of staff resources was experienced on two fronts. One was the teaching staff shortage in the Japanese studies area, language teaching as well as Japanese culture and related courses. The other was the shortage of Japanese specialists in other areas, such as Japanese economy, commerce and finance, political science, law and so forth.

The first impact brought about by the staff shortage in Japanese studies departments was a steep up-ward curve in the students-staff ratio. At the University of Queensland, for example, the student-staff 'EFTSU' ratio<sup>16</sup>